

THE TYRANNY OF OVERWORK

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SHOW US A WAY OUT?

BY RACHEL ANDERSON



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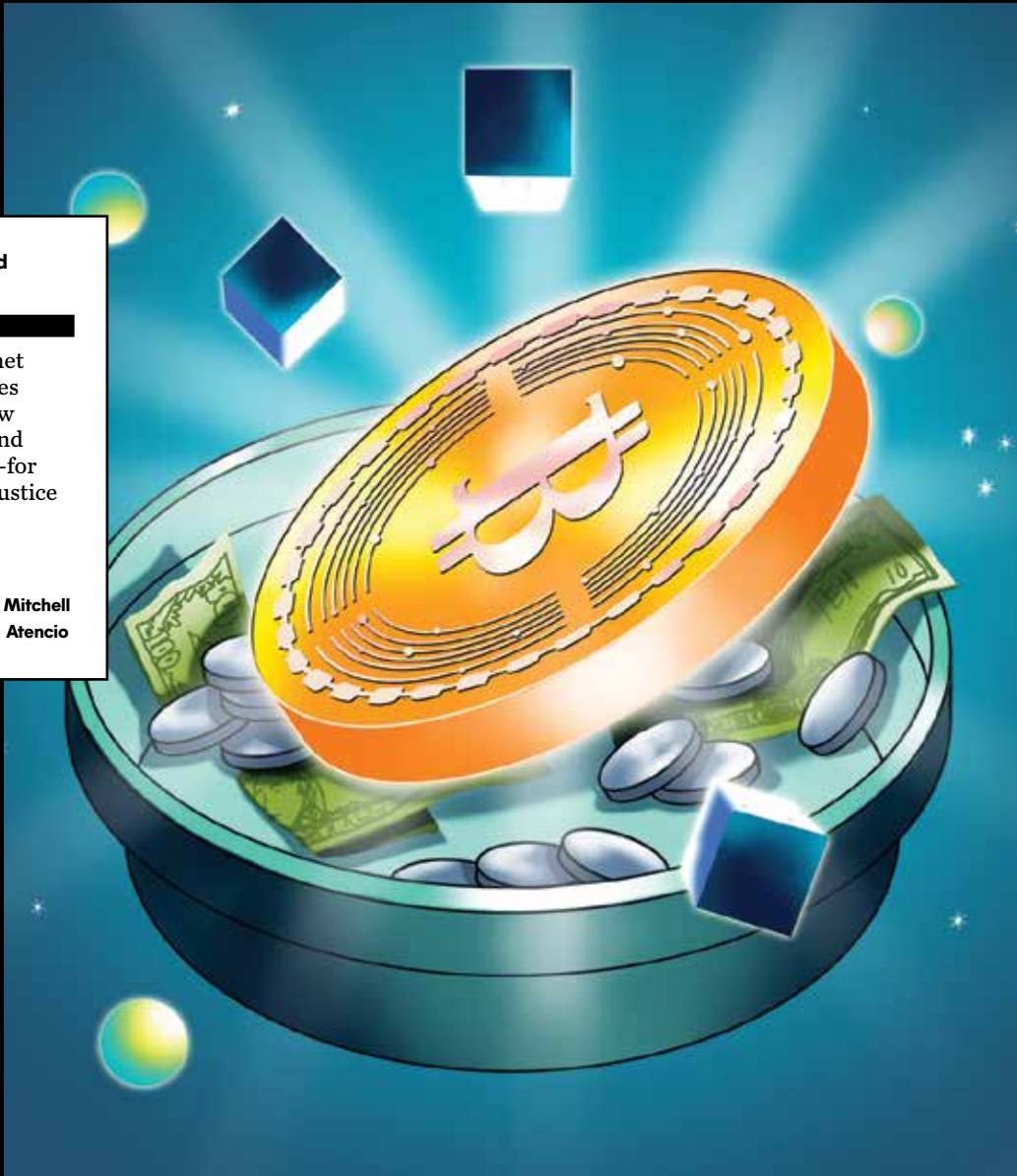
SOJOURNERS

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From the Editor

"Machines, whether mechanical or digital, aren't interested in truth, beauty, or justice. Their goal is to make the world a more efficient place for more machines." So argues journalist Andrew Nikiforuk, paraphrasing Jacques Ellul's seminal *The Technological Society*. "Their proliferation combined with our growing dependence on their services inevitably led to an erosion of human freedom and unintended consequences in every sphere of life."

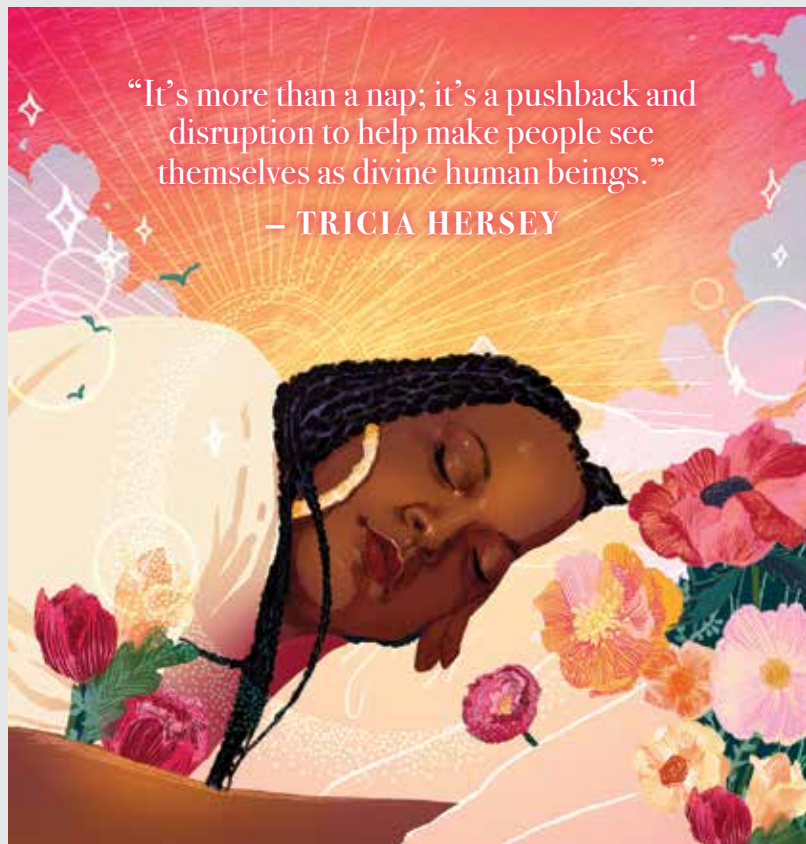
Anticipating the consequences—intended and otherwise—is a key aspect of ethical reflection on new technologies. In "Web 3.0 and the Church," author Mitchell Atencio points to a moral yardstick some Amish communities use in evaluating whether to adopt a particular technology: How will this affect our communal way of life? While Atencio sees potential benefits in church involvement in emerging digital technologies such as blockchain, the Amish guideline reminds us that technology must be approached with a hermeneutic of suspicion, a healthy skepticism of the idols of our age, and an unshakable commitment to "seek ye first" the reign of God—even, if not especially, in how we approach the most cutting-edge issues of today.

RESPONSE

We've Come a Long Way

In the November 2021 issue of *Sojourners*, Joy Ladin wrote about meeting God beyond the gender binary. "I have a close friend whose son is transitioning from a male to female identity, and his/her parents are working to get their minds around the whole thing," wrote Chris Longenecker of Lancaster, Pa. "I made a copy of the article for them, and they seemed very grateful." Tom Sine of Seattle emailed to express delight with "A Look Back" (November 2021), which offered a glimpse into *Sojourners'* first 50 years. "Those early publications were literally life-changing for me and many others. They started a conversation and a movement for many of us." R. Karl Watkins was one of them: "I picked up *The Post-American* 50 years ago at the Wesley Foundation at Kent State University. I was reminded I still have it when I saw the latest edition."

Write us: response@sojo.net



"MY MISSION
IN LIFE
IS NOT
MERELY TO
SURVIVE,
BUT TO
THRIVE."

Maya Angelou

Poet, storyteller, and activist

CONTRIBUTING



Rachel Anderson

Growing up in a mixed-income Milwaukee neighborhood, Rachel Anderson (p. 20) saw firsthand how “a generous God” could be warped by the “social selfishness” of our culture, a paradox that has motivated her. Currently a resident fellow with the Center for Public Justice, Anderson’s work has focused on finance and family, “because they are, alternatively, the mechanisms through which economic injustice can operate and one of the sacred places it harms.”



Joey Chin

“I’ve always just appreciated being around people who love to dream big,” says Joey Chin (p. 46), an elementary school teacher and former *Sojourners* editorial fellow. In his classroom, Chin provides space for students to do the same, encouraging them to “think about creating a different world than the one we live in.” When he’s not teaching, Chin reads, watches movies, and reflects on his fellowship year—all to find inspiration for his next humor column.

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS Michelle Alexander, Diana Butler Bass, Walter Brueggemann, Joan Chittister, Shane Claiborne, Danny Duncan Collum, Michael Curry, Edwidge Danticat, Marie Dennis, Julian DeShazier, E.J. Dionne Jr., Kelly Brown Douglas, Joshua DuBois, Michael Eric Dyson, Reta Halteman Finger, Kenyatta R. Gilbert, Eddie Glaude, Wes Granberg-Michaelson, David Gushee, Cynthia L. Hale, Lisa Sharon Harper, Jen Hatmaker, Obery Hendricks, Carolina Hinojosa-Cisneros, Barbara A. Holmes, Joel Hunter, Luan Huska, Kathy Khang, Grace Ji-Sun Kim, Anne Lamott, James Martin, Bill McKibben, Brian McLaren, Jeania Ree V. Moore, Otis Moss III, Ched Myers, Whitney Parnell, Eboo Patel, Soong-Chan Rah, Richard Rohr, Alexia Salvatierra, Rob Schenck, Najeeba Syeed, Barbara Brown Taylor, Sharon E. Watkins, Cornel West, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Randy Woodley, Bill Wylie-Kellermann, Jenny Yang, Faith-Marie Zambé

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> \$10
billion

Amount the Sackler family
earned from opioid sales

69,710

Number of U.S. opioid
overdose deaths in 2020

81 million

Opioid pills shipped to
pharmacies in Huntington,
W.Va., from 2006 to 2014

OUR MISSION

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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1

MOBILIZING HOPE

BY ADAM RUSSELL TAYLOR

PREGNANT HOPE

During Advent, I always love reading and reflecting on Mary's Magnificat, which begins, "My soul magnifies the Lord." This song is more well-known and treasured within the Catholic Church than in my own tradition; I didn't fully learn to appreciate it until I started delving deeper into Catholic social teaching. It is easy to gloss over how radical and profound this song of praise is ("He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty"), both when Mary proclaimed these words as well as for us today. This song, which is only found in the gospel of Luke, comes just after Mary greets her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist and whose baby moves within her womb.

MARY REMINDS US THAT, ULTIMATELY, THE MIGHTY WILL BE BROUGHT DOWN FROM THEIR THRONES AND THE HUNGRY WILL BE FILLED WITH GOOD THINGS.

“MARY’S SONG HELPS US TRANSITION FROM NECESSARY LAMENT TO FERVENT PRAISE.”

Mary’s song provides a timeless dose of pregnant hope during a year that has been characterized by so much peril, loss, and hardship. As we prepare to put 2021 behind us, it is important to take the time to properly lament the tragedy and heartache of this past year, including the hundreds of thousands of largely preventable deaths to COVID-19; the ways our democracy and the right to vote have come under increasing assault; the stark, often-devastating reminders of our mounting climate catastrophe; and so much more.

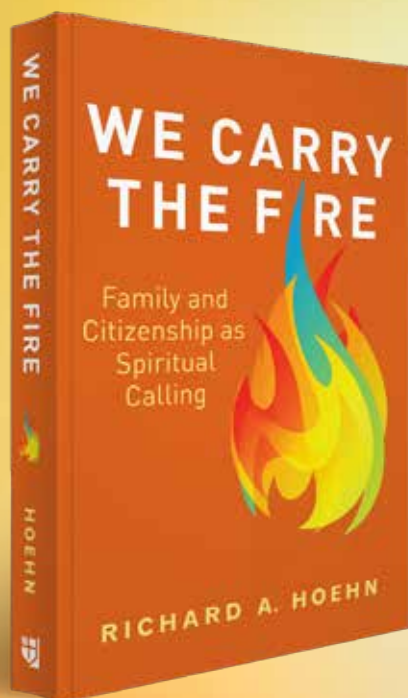
Mary’s song helps us transition from necessary lament to fervent praise, because even amid great suffering and inequity, she offers a hopeful reminder of God’s promises and character. Mary reminds us that, ultimately, the proud will be scattered, the mighty brought down from their thrones, and the hungry filled with good things.

In the season of Advent, as we anticipate the birth of our Savior, the one who is called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), we can all find hope in Mary’s hymn. Hope that the dark days of this pandemic are numbered. Hope that a new and radically more equitable “normal” is both necessary and within our grasp. Hope that a steadfast love toward our neighbors as well as our enemies can replace so much of the enmity and contempt that has poisoned our culture and politics. Hope that a record-breaking year of climate catastrophes will generate a long overdue tipping point in political will. Hope that we all can experience a deeper sense of fellowship and community as we return to in-person worship. Hope that we can learn some valuable and lasting lessons from this long and painful pandemic season of exile and wilderness, including those things that we can let go of and those things that we hold most dear.

Mary’s song provides a much-needed injection of hope as we prepare to embrace the possibilities and promise of a new year. Because if we can internalize and act on Mary’s timeless call to lift up the lowly, practice humility, and feed the hungry, 2022 will almost assuredly be a much more hopeful and gratifying year. ✦



Adam Russell Taylor is president of Sojourners.



RICHARD A. HOEHN: pastor, activist, grassroots organizer, professor, former Director of Bread for the World Institute.

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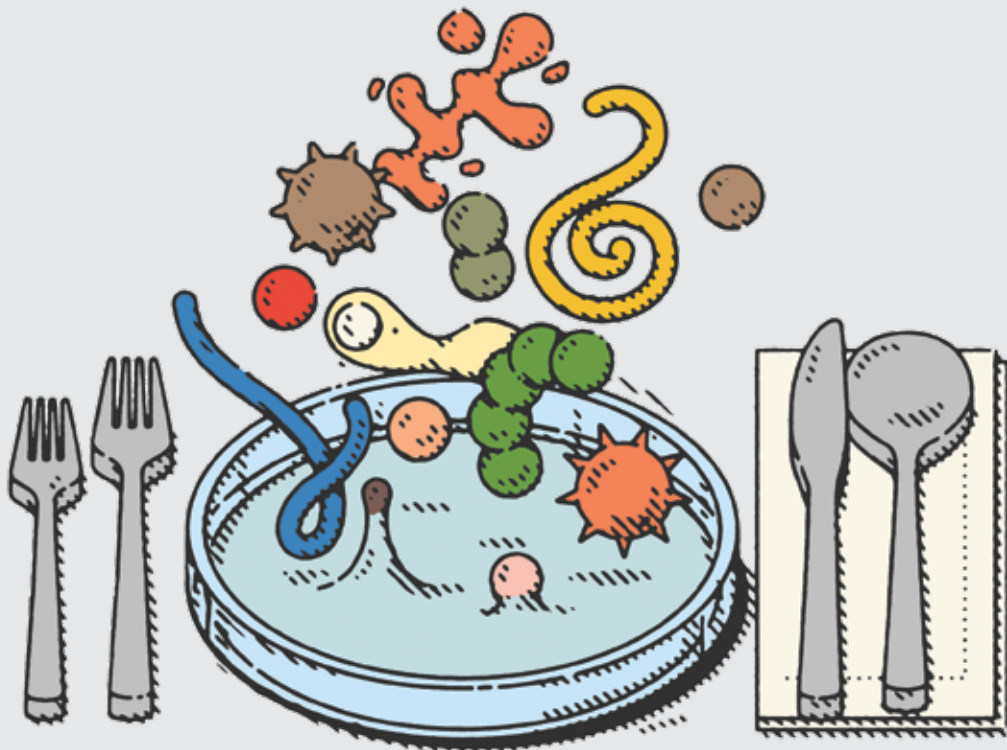


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BEYOND VACCINES TO GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

Can the exclusive pursuit of “technological fixes” substitute for addressing the world’s deeper moral challenges?



2

Two years after likely origination in a wet market in China, the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 and its mutations are spreading across the globe with terrible, long-term consequences. We now know what it's like to have a global-scale crisis, one that disrupts everything.

Infectious disease specialists have been warning governments for a long time about such impending crises, and the World Health Organization (WHO) had encouraged countries to ensure that they met minimum standards for pandemic preparedness long before COVID-19. In 2018, the WHO detected outbreaks of six of its eight “priority diseases” for the first time. The rise of populist nationalism in recent decades has led governments to starve the United Nations and the WHO of the financial resources and authority they need to safeguard global public goods, instead of empowering these institutions to act. So, while pandemics are a result of our global interconnectedness, they are exacerbated by our lack of global cooperation.

While a glimmer of light has emerged in the form of remarkable vaccines that are safe

and offer hope to many, there are serious questions about who has access to them, and how soon. A group of more than 170 former world leaders and Nobel laureates has urged President Joe Biden to support the demand by South Africa and India for the World Trade Organization to temporarily waive COVID-19 vaccine patents so that vaccine know-how and technology can be shared openly with all.

However, there is also the all-important question of whether the exclusive pursuit of “technological fixes” can ever be a substitute for addressing the deeper moral, ecological, and political challenges the world has been ignoring and that have exacerbated COVID-19. The underlying causes of pandemics are the same global environmental changes that drive biodiversity loss and anthropogenic climate change.

The U.N.’s Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) held a workshop in 2020 that warned “an estimated 1.7 million currently undiscovered viruses are thought to exist in mammal and avian hosts. Of these, 631,000-827,000 could have the ability to infect humans.” Additionally, the workshop report revealed that “more than five new diseases” emerge annually in human populations, any one of which could breakthrough as a global pandemic. These top scientists concluded, “Our business-as-usual approach to pandemics is based on containment and control after a disease has emerged and relies primarily on reductionist approaches to vaccine and therapeutic development rather than on reducing the drivers of pandemic risk to prevent them before they emerge.”

Pandemics originate from microbes held in animal disease reservoirs, but their emergence is driven solely by human activities. These include changes in land use for expanding and intensifying agricultural development and livestock production, deforestation, human settlement in primarily wildlife habitats, and urban sprawl, according to the IPBES. All these activities accelerate contact between wildlife, livestock, and people, allowing animal-based microbes to enter human populations and lead to infections or outbreaks, and sometimes into full-blown pandemics that spread quickly along travel routes and in high-density urban areas.

The search for exotic new dishes by the bored rich, as well as widespread hunger,

THE SEARCH FOR EXOTIC DISHES BY THE BORED RICH LEADS TO NEW VIRUSES.

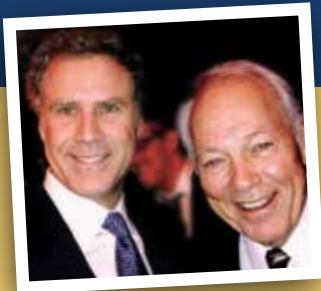
leads to the breach by new viruses of animal-human barriers. In Kenya, hunger, worsened by lockdown measures, has pushed some to eat giraffe meat and that of other endangered species.

Unless we make transformative changes in our taken-for-granted “lifestyles,” the costs of climate change coupled with more-regular pandemics will prove disastrous for the entire human race. This will be a century of crises (despite technological breakthroughs), many of them more dangerous than what we are currently experiencing.

Once mass immunizations spread and the threat of COVID-19 recedes, there should not be any return to “business as usual,” either within or between nations. It has to be a wake-up call to political, business, and intellectual leaders to take a long, hard look at their socially and ecologically destructive policies. If we ever needed wise, globally minded public leaders—as opposed to mere politicians—it is now. ♦

Vinoth Ramachandra, author of *Sarah’s Laughter: Doubt, Tears, and Christian Hope*, serves on the senior leadership team of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. He lives in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

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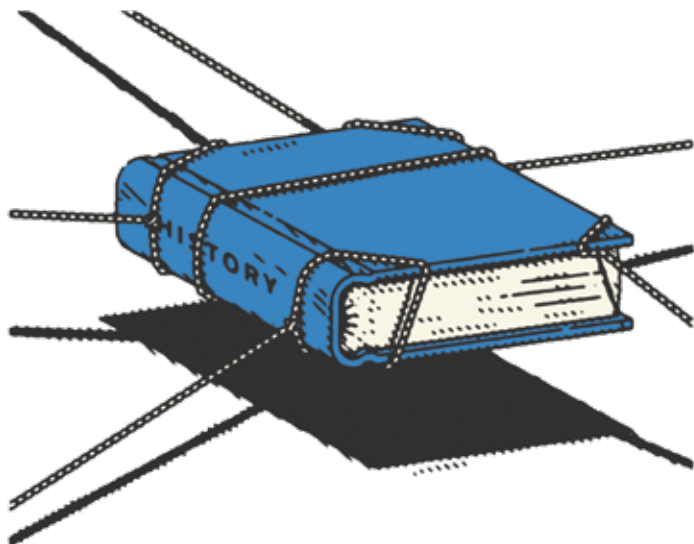
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COMMENTARY

BY DAVID WILEY CAMPT
AND ALLISON MAHALEY

A CRITICAL CONVERSATION

How can we flip the script on divisive debate to promote overdue dialogue on racism?

Despite the fact that critical race theory (CRT) is a complicated academic theory that some scholars use to examine disproportionate outcomes in the criminal justice system, school board meetings across the U.S. have erupted in passionate debates with parents demanding it be banned.

Ironically, CRT cannot be taught to children because it is not age appropriate for K-12—just as we would not teach advanced nuclear physics to schoolchildren. Yet the strategic placement by far-right activists of a narrative that CRT has crept into K-12 education is causing dramatic outbursts of racial anxiety. All this passion could be rerouted to address an important question that everyone cares about: What should children be taught about race and racism in the United States? This conversation, if done well, could actually move our society toward much-needed racial healing.

What can you do to promote racial healing amid the current anti-CRT mania? We say, flip the script. Do something unexpected with the energy.

In our years of instructing in civic dialogue and working in public schools, we've found three steps to help people get started: common ground, honesty, and civil discourse. First, find and speak about common ground. For example, anti-CRT advocates make three basic claims

where we can find common ground: 1) we don't want our children hating themselves because of their skin color; 2) we don't want children holding shame about things they themselves had nothing to do with (inheriting racism from the past); and 3) we don't want children hating the United States because it was founded using slave labor. (None of us living today made that decision.) Starting with an assertion of common ground can shift the negative energy of public meetings and will give you more credibility with school board members.

The second step is to be honest about how negative stereotypes about people of color and white-superiority thinking sometimes creep into our own minds. Remember that time we locked our doors because we saw a lot of Black people gathered on a corner or when we assumed the Latino man at our child's school was the janitor instead of a classmate's parent? Every one of us—even people of color—have had a moment of this type of bias against historically disadvantaged groups. It is ubiquitous. And yet, we don't talk about it. We pretend that having these thoughts makes us monsters. In reality, having these thoughts means we have spent time in the U.S., where systemic racism exists.

The third step is to call on our public officials to encourage civil public discourse on this topic: "What should we teach children in public schools about racism?" Doing this flips the script from one focused on "banning CRT" to a much-needed conversation about race and racism. It is a myth that talking about race makes racism worse. These public dialogues could bring American communities closer to a healthier democracy where we explore collectively what anti-BIPOC biases we have absorbed, how we can change the narratives in our heads, and how we can become more aware of these biases so we can stop contributing to cycles that cause harm to people of color.

If we lean into working out what and how to teach our children about race and racism in the U.S., then we can teach children that our ancestors—people of all colors—fought to end racism and to advance freedom in our country for all people. And that's something that can make us all proud. ✱

David Wiley Campt and **Allison Mahaley** are principals in The Dialogue Company, which promotes civil discourse.

O

WHO ARE YOU WEARING?



Our clothes bear more than our personal style. Stitched into favorite garments is the suffering of those who made them.

From Bangladesh to Vietnam, millions of garment workers are exploited to feed the burgeoning demand for ready-made wardrobes. These workers endure unsafe working conditions and workplace abuse to meet the mounting quotas imposed by hungry clothing brands—all while being paid pennies per hour.

Garment workers' labor conditions seized the attention of international media in 2013 when the Rana Plaza factory collapsed in Dhaka, Bangladesh, killing more than 1,100 people. This disaster accelerated the work of human rights organizations such as the Worker Rights Consortium, the Maquila Solidarity Network, and the Clean Clothes Campaign that were already collaborating with corporations to implement safety protocols in the supply chains. This collaboration birthed the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh (the "Bangladesh Accord"), which was the first international agreement to include global brands, retailers, and trade unions in a legally binding framework.

The accord required brands and retailers to subject their supplier factories to fully independent investigations (and allow these results to be publicly reported), to pay for essential safety renovations, and to suspend business with factories found in violation, according to the Worker Rights Consortium.

"If there is no accord, there is no safety. There is no accountability, no responsibility," Nazma Akter, from the labor rights organization Awaj Foundation in Bangladesh, told *Vogue Business*.

In September, the Bangladesh Accord was superseded by the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Garment

and Textile Industry. This updated accord maintains the requirements of previous agreements and expands the scope to include health and human rights in ready-made garment factories and to other countries.

The accords, however, are no panacea. Though they are legally binding, signing them is voluntary. As of October, the International Accord had 135 signatories, but the largest brands—Louis Vuitton, Nike, GAP, and Benetton—were missing. This voluntary nature of the agreement gives brands little reason to sign. Unless, of course, they are pressured. This is where consumers can step in.

Though it's tempting to see "shopping ethically" as the best response to industry horrors, our words—politically directed and action-oriented—may have greater mileage. Journalist Elizabeth Cline encourages shoppers to shift from private acts of ethical consumption to "organized, collective social change that benefits everyone."

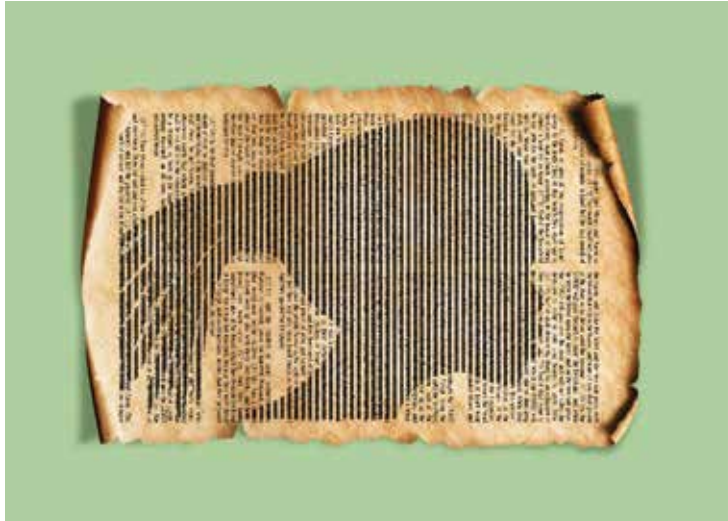
As Christians, we can practice the principle of solidarity through direct action by demanding brand accountability, amplifying garment workers' voices through social media campaigns, pressuring companies, and organizing under a common cause. As Pope John Paul II has said, "Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people ... it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good." Such actions that embody solidarity can effect meaningful change. For example, since March, consumer action through the PayUp Fashion movement helped secure at least \$15 billion in wages withheld from garment workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our actions can proclaim the dignity of those made vulnerable and shout the glory of God that is fully alive in the workers whose handiwork we wear every day. By centering garment worker voices, experiences, and demands, we can rally with them behind the policies they champion—such as the Garment Worker Protection Act recently passed in California. Faithful voices joined with political practices are certain to bear just fruits. ✕

**IT'S TEMPTING TO
SEE "SHOPPING
ETHICALLY" AS THE
BEST RESPONSE TO
INDUSTRY HORRORS.**

Céire Kealty is a doctoral student in theology at Villanova University, where she studies fashion theory, spirituality, and ethics.

TRANSLATING WOMEN BACK INTO SCRIPTURE



Nearly 1.4 billion Christians around the world receive their weekly exposure to the Bible through a lectionary. In the U.S., as many as 60 percent of Christians attend services in churches that follow a lectionary. For many Christians, this is their only regular exposure to our faith's sacred narrative.

Even for those who love the ecumenical unifying energy of a common lectionary, we also acknowledge that the scripture snippets we hear on Sundays are chosen almost exclusively by Euro-Anglo male scholars, using Bible translations that reflect the same. (The translation committee for the 2011 Common English Bible was the first to include scholars of color.) It's hard to embrace the Bible's liberating power when you can't find yourself in the story, and it's even harder to show up when you learn you've been edited out of it.

Enter *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church*, by Wilda C. Gafney, a professor of Hebrew Bible, offering not only an entirely new Christian lectionary but also rigorous and fresh Bible translations that *restore* women and feminine references to scripture, as well as text notes and preaching prompts—all in accessible language. "Recognizing that the scriptures are an androcentric collection of documents steeped in patriarchy, this lectionary grapples with the gender constructs of the text rather than romanticizing admirable heroines," Gafney explained. She wrote, "I was (and remain) convinced it ought to be possible to tell the story of God and God's people through the most marginalized characters in the text."

Gafney's paradigm-shifting lectionary "is a rare combination of impeccable scholarship and pastoral usability," wrote Sister Christine Shenk in *National Catholic Reporter*. New Testament and Jewish studies scholar Amy-Jill Levine told *Sojourners* that in "reminding readers that biblical texts have prompted violent and oppressive policies," Gafney "provides a service both to individual Christians and to the institutional church."

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In October, Gafney attained the highest academic award with which a university can honor a faculty member: a fully endowed professorship at Brite Divinity School in Fort Worth, Texas. In her inaugural lecture, "What if Bathsheba took the throne?" Gafney unfurled skillful textual interpretation, sanctified imagination, and delight in a refreshed lineage for Jesus. He is not only the "son of David" but also the "son of Bathsheba," Gafney said. "The Jesus of the gospels may have answered to the 'Son of David,' but he lived like, laughed like, loved like, wept like, suffered and died like the 'Son of Bathsheba.'"

The *Women's Lectionary*, Gafney said, is a "churchly project," designed for congregational and devotional life. One of her aims is "for people not only to be introduced to biblical characters and a wider assortment of women's stories but to hear themselves or hear people who are not them reflected in the Divine image explicitly." Gafney translates the people of God back into the text where we belong and forces us to wrestle not only with our complex biblical inheritance but with the "mixed multitude" (Exodus 12:38) that God calls today.

Only 36 percent of millennials claim church membership. *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church* is not only a much-needed catechetical tool, but a beautiful feast for evangelization. ♦

Rose Marie Berger, author of *Bending the Arch: Poems*, is senior editor of *Sojourners* magazine.

FROM THE DUST

BY LIUAN HUSKA

THE DISCIPLINE OF DELIGHT



In July, my children and I crouched at the edge of the continent along a trail spitting hikers onto Kalaloch Beach 1 in Olympic National Park. Eyes at dirt level, we marveled at a hidden-in-sight banana slug, oozing exquisite slime and swiveling its tentacles. Off Interstate 90 in Montana, we held our breath as a bald eagle swooped over a deer grazing just across the fence from our car. Throughout our epic road trip from Illinois to the Pacific Northwest, I kept saying, “Wow, but ...”

My wonder was tinged with a sense of impending loss. With fires devouring unthinkable amounts of forest just over the next mountain range and smoke clouding the skies for 1,500 miles, the beauty in front of me seemed to be slipping away. In the end, I took home more pain than joy.

Many of us live with this bone-deep grief over what we have lost in the natural world, and with anticipatory grief over what is about to be lost. It is right to feel this deeply, to lament and give voice to our pain in

FEASTING CAN BE AS MUCH A DISCIPLINE AS FASTING, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES WHEN WE FIND LITTLE TO CELEBRATE.

community. And then what? Grief, pain, and anger can move us to action, but they only carry us so far. To sustain our work, we need joy.

As I allow myself to be carried along the river of grief, feeling all the feelings, pumping my fist at the powers and principalities, sometimes, unexpectedly, I am released into quiet pools of presence. Here, the current of time isn’t flowing. The weight of what has passed and what is to come lifts. Cream-colored okra flowers unfurl in the garden, offering gratuitous loveliness where I only sought food. The wind at night is an embrace from a living, breathing earth.

Here, I sense that the deep life force sustaining the planet—we Christians would call this God—is very much undeterred. In these suspended moments of delight, I feel only gratitude for being alive. Even in such a time as this.

These moments are gifts, and we all need them. We need permission to enjoy the things we feel so compelled to protect and restore. As much as we must keep organizing and marching and emailing, sometimes we simply need to be among other living beings. Delighting in the earth’s gifts is key to then cherishing them for future generations.

Winter can be a space to delight. The wildfires, droughts, tornadoes, and hurricanes that increasingly plague us are paused, for a season. We are starting a new church year, and soon a new calendar year. As we look backward and forward in time, taking stock, can we also follow the lead of the trees and turtles and squirrels? Can we rest and be fallow? Can we “enjoy the fat of the land” (Isaiah 55:2) and “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8)?

Feasting can be as much a discipline as fasting, especially in times when we find little to celebrate. For the intense work ahead, this practice is not optional, but necessary. ✕

Liuan Huska is author of *Hurting Yet Whole: Reconciling Body and Spirit in Chronic Pain and Illness*. She lives on ancestral Potawatomi land near Chicago.

EYEWITNESS

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**“WATCHING STRANGERS
CONSOLE STRANGERS—
THAT WAS THE MAGIC
OF THE PLACE.”**

GRIEVING TOGETHER

“**['In America: Remember']** was a vast field of flags: one for each person who died from COVID-19. The installation began [in mid-September] when there were 666,624 deaths. Each day, I changed the number on the large sign. When the installation closed [in early October], there were 701,133 deaths.

People came thousands of miles to write words on 5-by-4-inch poly film attached to a steel stem. Each time somebody dedicated a flag, they were my co-artists. To have the privilege of watching strangers console strangers—that was the magic of the place. It was important to us to make sure that people had equal access to this art. Many people who had suffered losses could not afford the time or the expense of coming. So, we announced that the art was coming two months in advance so that people could plan. And we made sure that people could dedicate flags through our website.

I am privileged to have been a hospice volunteer for 25 years. I bring that willingness to witness grief to this art. We treat the one sure thing in all our lives as if it's never going to happen; that doesn't allow us to live fully. Having public acknowledgement [of grief] validates not only the person who has died, but also the family's grief. I saw a mother and a daughter who, after planting a flag, said a prayer and did the sign of the cross. One family scattered ashes. People treated it as a memorial service.

There was a flag dedicated to a woman named Kitty: 'I asked you to get vaccinated, but you said, *God will protect me*. The vaccine is from God. You passed the end of July.' I love the flag dedicator's more holistic understanding of God—that God works through people, and science, and society.” ✕

Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg, creator of “In America: Remember,” is a social practice artist in the Washington, D.C., area. She spoke with Sojourners' Jenna Barnett.



Time for rest and healing should be
predictable, trustworthy, and accessible to all.
In the United States today, it's not.

Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy

By Rachel Anderson
Illustrations by Matt Chase

MARRIED TO THE JOB?

In the United States, we are a nation accustomed to working “in sickness and in health,” more reflective of marriage vows than a labor contract. Americans work more hours, on average, than do workers in most other industrialized nations. There is evidence that today’s families devote more time to work than families a generation ago did. Economist Isabel V. Sawhill and researcher Katherine Guyot estimate that average middle-class married parents in the U.S. now work, collectively, 600 more hours per year than did a comparable couple in 1975—that’s two and a half months more.

Work is not only about volume but also about trade-offs. The dominant role work plays in U.S. culture and life reveals itself not only in the quantity of hours worked but when those hours occur and how those work hours interfere with other aspects of life. At least 20 percent of new mothers—more than 700,000 women each year—return to work just a few weeks after giving birth to a child. Three million Americans work while sick each week. At the precise moment that many Americans would like to be tending a new baby or recovering from a cold, they are working.

During this coronavirus pandemic, the high stakes associated with work became devastatingly clear. Early in the pandemic, there were reports of food processing plants with strict attendance policies where hundreds of workers got sick, and some died. Parents who were fortunate enough to work from home multitasked like never before. Parents and other family caregivers put in a daily average of 6.1 hours of “secondary childcare,” engaging in paid work and other tasks while also caring for children. Worry about whether one could take time off to receive and recover from the COVID-19 shot prevented some individuals from securing timely vaccinations.

PROBLEMS WITH A “MERITOCRACY”

Many in the U.S. are overworked, but the circumstances that provoke this condition vary. In knowledge-based sectors of the economy, competing for elite educational spots and limited job positions demands large investments of time and focus. Many corporate, financial, and legal firms offer clients round-the-clock service, which requires professionals in those fields to work extensive hours. Meanwhile, those who earn a living by selling must tirelessly

In March last year, as I was leaving a medical appointment, a nurse handed me a small, leopard-print cosmetic case with a pink ribbon attached. “A gift from us.”

This is not the kind of gift one wants to receive. I had been diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a welcome-and-sympathy gift wrapped up in one. With two young children distance-learning at home, I had considered a wide range of maladies our family might encounter—from “Zoom fatigue” to learning loss to the coronavirus itself. But not cancer.

My unpreparedness for major illness meant that I had no primary care physician, no relationship with any of the major health systems in my area, and no access to paid leave.

All this despite the fact that I was a professional advocate for family-leave policies. During the last several years, nearly all my working hours were spent researching, writing about, and promoting more humane work and family policies. I have often made this case to employers and legislators: All workers, at some point in their lives, will experience illness, frailty, or the need to care for someone else. It is wiser to anticipate and honor this aspect of humanity than to ignore it.

Now, the human in question is me.

I had not prepared for an illness requiring rest and extensive treatment. Work—both that for which I earn a living and all that goes into raising children and managing a household—played a defining role in structuring my days. Needing to *not* work was barely imaginable.

Learning about the Sabbath was part of my childhood catechesis in the Lutheran tradition. But the biblical commandment to “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” was presented as a personal exhortation to attend church each Sunday, rather than a practice that might transform the relationship between people and work.



Work-on-demand amounts to a perpetual refusal of permission to rest.

jockey for attention, often on increasingly crowded media platforms.

Although it may seem counterintuitive, *overwork* can impact those who are *underemployed*. As of 2016, 1 in 10 Americans, many of whom work in service or hospitality industries, were involuntarily underemployed, receiving fewer work hours than they would like. This workforce faces distinct pressures. Retail workers, for example, are often called to work shifts with little notice, or are asked to arrive early or stay late. Underemployment, combined with job type, can prompt one to accept whatever work hours are offered, no matter the trade-offs.

Research by the Shift Project, a collaboration between Harvard and the University of California San Francisco, illustrates that parents who experience variable scheduling are more likely than others to leave young children alone or with a sibling. Showing up for work despite being unable to secure a safe place for one's children is a kind of overwork. Although there is evidence that a tighter labor market may lead some employers to increase wages, it is not yet clear that those same dynamics will cause employers to change the job structures and workplace norms that lead to overwork.

America's ideology of a meritocracy enables overwork. In the U.S., economic security is too often associated with worthiness and worthiness with work. We work to achieve security. We keep working to justify whatever security and success comes our way or to avoid blame if we lack either. A meritocratic ideology suggests that overwork is a natural condition and possibly even a virtuous one, while at the same time rendering invisible those who, because of physical or mental condition, never fit into the meritocratic work structure in the first place.

Finally, of course, there are the paltry sums of paid and protected time off that Americans receive. Most industrialized nations guarantee between five and 15 days of employer-paid time off for illness followed by a public benefit for longer periods of illness or recovery. The United States lacks such a system for guaranteeing paid sick leave. Likewise, the U.S. is one of the few nations that fails to guarantee paid leave to new parents. Basic benefits are meted out through the negotiation of employers and employees, a patchwork approach that yields limited benefits and from which one can quickly fall. Those employees who are offered paid sick days through their work secure an average of



eight paid days off a year. Fifteen million people in the U.S. workforce do not have an employer at all but rather are contractors, self-employed, or seasonal workers and are rarely entitled to any paid time off.

Our stingy benefits system contributes to overwork in two ways. First, it withholds the material resources required to take necessary breaks from work. For example, of the U.S. parents who had leave available following adopting or giving birth to a new child, slightly more than 50 percent took less time off work than they wanted. The major reason cited for returning to work early was concern over lost wages or salary. Workers without paid sick days are 1.5 times more likely to show up to work when ill and to forgo medical care. Second, our inconsistent

system of paid-leave benefits withholds the social signals that enable humans to cease working when needed, to rest. Social signals are direct or indirect communication that provide information through social behavior, emotions, and relationships. American culture is biased toward work, earnings, and production, with less social signaling in support of time spent in cultural, recreational, and relational activities or at rest.

PERMISSION TO REST

When I became sick last winter, I was standing right at the precipice of overwork. Many of the ingredients were present—contingent work without paid time off, family care layered on top of paid work.

A lifetime spent on meritocracy's treadmill taught me that whatever supports or benefits I lacked, I did not yet deserve. Even though my Sabbath theology had broadened since I was a child, work's pull had also strengthened. As a parent, Sunday became not only a day of worship but also the temporal staging ground for the week ahead. After church, I would compile a list of meals, parenting responsibilities, and appointments for the next six days.

A cancer diagnosis transformed my fundamental relationship to work. My "job" suddenly became much simpler: to remain alive. I accepted fewer work hours and took time off for treatment. This life-saving shift required, principally, resources. I rely on a spouse with a steady income. But I also connect the shift to that

leopard-print cosmetic case. Stuffed with a pair of pink socks, lip balm, nausea-soothing devices, and other self-care sundries, the gift also carried something invisible yet also essential: permission to rest.

“Time as we now experience it in fact depends heavily on how our culture organizes and uses it,” writes Todd D. Rakoff in *A Time for Every Purpose*, a book about the law of time. So much of our time is dominated by work, in part because there are few cultural cues marking out time for rest. Rest is often treated like negative space. It is what’s left over when work is done. The pink-ribboned case was a rare cultural cue that sanctioned rest. It signaled my membership in a particular sorority of sufferers—a sorority whose members society agrees to release, at least briefly, from the quest for favor through work.

The biblical tradition is one in which rest has an affirmative and, even, holy purpose. Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes, “The Sabbath sanctifies time through sanctioned forms of rest and inaction.” God gave the Sabbath to humanity by first modeling and then commanding it (Genesis 2:1-3). Sabbath-keeping mirrors God’s decision to rest after six days of creative work. For humans, Sabbath rest is both the fulfillment of the work that precedes it and an expression of worship.

In modern Christianity, Sabbath is often considered a personal practice, but scripture presents it as a social instruction. After God liberated the Hebrew people from oppression in Egypt, God brought them to a daunting wilderness. There, they were offered divine provision in the form of bread appearing outside their tents each morning. Alongside this gift, God issued a time-shaping requirement: On six days the people of God were to gather bread, but on the seventh day they were to rest (Exodus 16:22-26).

The whole community was to desist from gathering bread on the seventh day. God prohibited reward and, indeed, rebuked anyone who sought to secure advantage over their neighbors through an extra day of work. Observing Sabbath both required and engendered communal trust. The Sabbath, suggests Judith Shulevitz in *The Sabbath World*, is a “mutual non-compete clause.” Sabbath wisdom teaches that rest and social trust are integrally connected. The human body cannot rest well without trust in the community that surrounds it. It relies on predictability, security.

Rest is often treated like negative space—what’s left over when work is done.

This connection between rest and trust, and lack thereof, presents itself in the negative in many contemporary workplaces. Research documents a clear association, for example, between variable scheduling and sleep disruption. It is not only that workers who are routinely asked to work late into the night or start before dawn trade sleep for work. Disorders like insomnia also emerge in response to precarious work. It is as if work-on-demand amounts to a perpetual refusal of permission to rest.

The Sabbath I’d practiced before I became sick was a Sabbath in miniature, fixed in time and purpose. To be sure, weekly Sabbath-keeping is a good. As a habitual spiritual discipline, it can become a foundation for a deeper personal and communal trust in God and one another. But in my case, I had instrumentalized the practice, using it to propel me toward the next cycle of work. Despite my post-diagnosis shifts, choosing to rest remains a partial, emergent practice for me. But I have come to experience Sabbath as more capacious and mysterious than I previously had; its gifts—be they prayer or emotional clarity or respite from pain—only revealing themselves once I have stepped into its sphere.

GOD’S DIVINE HUMOR

Encountering my permission to rest through a cosmetic case gestures at God’s divine humor. But the gift also illustrates a problem with our prevailing culture of time.

Since the late 1980s, breast cancer has been the focus of extensive cause marketing efforts that simultaneously raise awareness and promote commerce. The pink ribbon, popularized by cosmetic maker Estée Lauder, traffics in its association with wellness, tenacity, and womanhood. The pink ribbon’s ubiquity helped me claim time for rest. But what about illnesses that are not poised to move an audience or suited to product sales? What about the diseases that lurk less visibly in sufferers’ lives? A community that approves rest only for those maladies that acquire cultural cachet and commercial power cannot be a just or a trustworthy one.

The last widespread social sanction for rest occurred eight decades ago. The five-day work week and, its companion, the weekend, reformed the industrial era’s excessive work patterns. Contemporary movements for paid family and medical leave, fair scheduling practices, or a guaranteed month of paid time off per worker per year all build on the legacy of affirming time for work and for rest.

Just as the material resources required for rest depend on chance—the nature of one’s job or one’s familial safety net—so does the social permission to rest. But it does not need to be this way. Wisdom-rooted traditions, rather than marketing campaigns, should shape our time. Time for rest should be predictable, trustworthy, and universal. Everyone, at some point in our lives, will experience sickness, frailty, or the need to care for someone else. ✦

Rachel Anderson is a resident fellow with the Center for Public Justice where she founded the Families Valued program.

BREAK -ING FREE OF FEAR



FINDING FAITH IN GOD,
MYSELF, AND TREATMENT
FOR OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE
DISORDER.

BY KATIE O'DUNNE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
BLAKE CALE

Even in my earliest memories, I was consumed by terrifying worries and did everything in my power to alleviate my deepest fears. When I was 8, I can remember being plagued by guilt following the death of my aunt to cancer, worrying that it was somehow my fault. Intrusive thoughts and images flooded my mind at night, and I called my parents into my room to confess, seeking reassurance that I was not a dangerous monster. As I grew older, my fears began to consume every single area of my life that was important to me. By college, I was afraid to sleep out of fear that I had left the stove on or the door unlocked. And by graduate school, I moved through my day wondering if I had called people derogatory names or written horrific things in birthday cards before blocking the memories out. I repeatedly checked the stove, took pictures of locks, and called friends to make sure I hadn't somehow caused harm. At the time, I was unaware that these acts, known as "compulsions," only made my condition worse.

In my early 20s, I learned that I was experiencing the symptoms of a diagnosable mental illness known as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). OCD is often represented in television and movies as something laughable—think Tony Shalhoub's Monk. In reality, OCD is far more serious: a debilitating disorder defined by unwanted obsessions that terrify the sufferer and compulsions repeated over and over to alleviate overwhelming fear, guilt, or anxiety. Some obsessions might relate to more commonly known themes of contamination or organization, while others might include culturally taboo themes involving violence or sex. But they are all equally painful to those caught in OCD's grasp.

We all have thoughts—happy, sad, violent, intrusive, and strange. But those with OCD tend to place more value on these thoughts, concerned that they may be true. When time spent experiencing these obsessions and engaging in compulsions impedes functionality, that's when it becomes a disorder. But even in my struggles, I feared documentation of an official diagnosis would negatively impact my pursuit of ordination. I had always heard that we should turn our worries to God, so I wondered what those approving my psychological evaluations for ministry would think if they viewed me as in need of mental health treatment that could not be solved through prayer.

By the time I moved into my first role in ministry, my head was spinning with every

worry possible: *What if I said something mean to a student in class and forgot about it? What if I kicked the child on crutches? What if I snap and stab someone? What if I'm secretly a murderer and just blocked it out? What if I'm just pretending to be a moral minister and am secretly a horrible person? What if God hates me?* I was living two lives—the calm, peaceful, joyful chaplain supporting students and the person inside my head telling me I deserved absolutely nothing. The pain of feeling like an imposter consumed every ounce of my being, and I was swimming upstream through quicksand just to move from one moment to the next.

SAYING "MAYBE"

According to the International OCD Foundation (IOCDF), 1 in 100 adults (2 million to 3 million in the U.S.) are diagnosed with OCD and experience many of the same things that made me feel so alone. Unfortunately, it can take 14 to 17 years for those struggling to find effective treatment, as many individuals—even clinicians not specializing in OCD—are unaware of the evidence-based treatment options.

My mom was frantically searching online to help me when she came across a treatment known as exposure and response prevention (ERP). According to the IOCDF, the treatment has "the strongest evidence supporting its use in the treatment of OCD," along with a class of medications called SSRIs. As part of ERP, individuals, under the guidance of a trained therapist, are exposed to their most terrifying fears while prevented from completing compulsions to alleviate the anxiety. It is important to note that obsessions are ego-dystonic, meaning they vehemently oppose an individual's values. The false warning alarm going off in the brain begins to subside as those in treatment begin to habituate. This has nothing to do with disproving the fears; rather, it retrains the brain to cope with the uncertainties of life in a healthy way. For some, this may mean not taking their temperature despite a fear that they may be sick. For others, it may mean a willingness to continue driving despite the fear that they could have hit someone on the road without knowing it. Or perhaps it means leaving the house without checking the stove or without taking a picture to check that it is off when the fear arises later in the day. Or it might mean ceasing to fix an imperfect prayer despite fear of eternal damnation.

ERP seemed to oppose every coping mechanism I had utilized throughout my life. After 15 years of reassuring myself by checking to make sure nothing bad would happen, I was being asked to say “maybe” to my greatest fears. I’d kept my struggles a secret for years, fearful they would negatively impact my vocation or change the way individuals viewed my ability as a clergy member. But after the loss of a close friend to suicide and a subsequent OCD relapse in my own life, I promised myself I would begin speaking up.

Mental illness is a painfully authentic part of my experience. And while it does not define me, the experience of navigating treatment and recovery has deeply impacted the ways I serve as a minister. It is a space where God created beauty out of brokenness in my life. In fact, since my relapse and plunge into advocacy, my biggest joy in life has become helping clinicians support individuals of faith, while helping faith communities better understand mental health treatments, especially OCD. I volunteer as an advocate with the IOCDF and helped form their faith task force, through which I spend a large amount of my time helping clergy and clinicians collaborate as they support patients experiencing a form of OCD focused on obsessions with a religious or moral character known as “scrupulosity.” I lead a support group with people who struggle to differentiate their daily religious practices from compulsive behavior. For some, repetitive prayer, washing, confession, types of fasting, fears of offending God, or worries about committing a sin might be manifestations of OCD. These members of our congregations often value their faith deeply, and yet OCD has taken every aspect of joy out of practicing the faith so important to them.

Those navigating religious scrupulosity feel their world shatter every time they are told to be “anxious for nothing” within the walls of their house of worship. As an interfaith chaplain at a large private school, I’ve found that this directive from Philippians 4:6 spans across religious traditions. Anxiety is characterized as a spiritual failing, and diagnosable mental health conditions are too often deemed the result of improperly living out one’s faith. Each day, I have students from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu traditions enter my office to tell me they are struggling with their mental health but are fearful how their family or faith community might react. Some of these students have formal diagnoses and are still told they simply need to “pray

harder.” And while prayer can play a role in treatment, the directive on its own can be fatal.

BREAKING THE STIGMA

Thankfully, many faith communities are becoming much more open to conversations around mental health. And yet, the focus on mental health within the church does not always include diagnosable mental illness. This seems to be a trend within our culture, as influencers use their platforms to encourage individuals to focus on self-care. While self-care and mindfulness are wonderfully important, they can also become stigmatizing, as the focus tends to be on general mental health that everyone needs as they move through their life. For those with OCD, talking about general mental health is different from opening up about intrusive thoughts. This understanding is crucial so that we can encourage individuals to move into the necessary treatment specific to their illness, the same way we would encourage an individual diagnosed with asthma to visit a pulmonologist as opposed to trying generic breathing techniques. Many clergy want to support the mental health of their congregations but lack the necessary tools.

For such ministers, I recommend the following:

1. Take steps to destigmatize mental illness in your congregation by discussing it openly in a homily or authentically sharing your own experience. Do not be afraid to share about your own struggles, recognizing our common humanity from the pulpit to the pews.

2. Attend a Mental Health First Aid training or host a similar training within the walls of your congregation to familiarize those in your community with symptoms of mental illness. Create and share a list of mental health resources in your area.

3. Collaborate with mental health networks, such as the IOCDF or the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Many organizations are becoming more open to collaboration with faith leaders, recognizing that patient-centered care involves the integration of spiritual and mental health.

4. Consider ways your congregation might support community members financially. One of the greatest barriers to treatment, outside of stigma, is the high cost of therapy, medication, or intensive treatment admittance—often without the option of insurance for evidence-based, specialized care.

5. Learn to acknowledge the line between individuals practicing their faith in a value-driven way, as opposed to those who might be experiencing religious scrupulosity. And if you notice something that might be concerning, always begin the conversation from a place of support and affirmation.

In many cases, simply acknowledging that someone in your congregation is struggling and taking the step to refer them to an expert can be lifesaving. While many clergy bear witness to mental health struggles, studies show they refer as few as 10 percent of cases to clinicians. Some fear that clinicians will deter an individual from participating in their spiritual practices. As IOCDF advocate Valerie Andrews says, “there is a fear of outsourcing God.” However, in the case of scrupulosity, many clinicians simply want to work collaboratively to help the individual regain a

THOSE NAVIGATING RELIGIOUS SCRUPULOSITY FEEL THEIR WORLD SHATTER EVERY TIME THEY ARE TOLD TO BE “ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING.”

healthy relationship with their faith. In fact, many experts on the faith task force have credentials as both faith leaders and clinicians treating OCD. Our monthly conversations often center around ways to bring these communities together, as well as ways to remind individuals in our faith communities to love themselves as God loves them.

DIVINELY CREATED

Once I learned to embrace my own struggles, receive treatment, and become open about my identity as a minister navigating OCD, it seemed like space for people from all faiths to share their struggles with me was organically—or perhaps divinely—created. I now serve as a lead advocate with IOCDF, focusing on letting individuals know that faith and mental health treatment are not mutually exclusive

and supporting other advocates with the IOCDF who are working to do the same. I hear from faith leaders and lay people multiple times a week who are struggling in silence with their mental health, because shame leads them to believe they simply aren't "faithful enough" or aren't "praying hard enough." Despite what OCD says, these thoughts are *not* true. You can fully embrace your faith while receiving appropriate therapy and treatment. And we must all work in harmony to convey this message: Faith leaders must suspend the belief that clinicians will minimize faith, and clinicians must trust collaboration with faith leaders around spirituality and narrative-based care.

Growing up, I was often taught to "love my neighbor as myself," based on Jesus' directive in the gospels. But in the depths of mental illness, I often neglected the part

of that directive that told me to offer that same love to myself. Through my recovery, I realized that without learning to love myself, I could never love my neighbor in the deep, meaningful way that God intended. I deeply believe that it is possible to have faith in God, faith in yourself, and faith in your treatment. For me, this "recovery trinity of faith" saved my life. Sitting in front of my seminary doctoral cohort and sharing about my mental illness—when I worked so hard to hide it just a decade before—felt completely freeing. I've finally become the authentic person God created me to be. ✕

Katie O'Dunne is the interfaith school chaplain at Woodward Academy in the Atlanta metro region and an endurance athlete currently tackling 50 ultra-marathons for OCD awareness.

WEB 3.0 AND THE CHURCH

**NEW INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES PRESENT NEW
OPTIONS—AND QUESTIONS—FOR CHRISTIANS'
WORK FOR JUSTICE.**

BY MITCHELL ATENCIO

**ILLUSTRATIONS BY
GLENN HARVEY**



IN 1995,

Bob Sabath, then-administrator of Sojourners' new website, wrote about how the World Wide Web might expand and change faith communities. "This next decade may show that the greatest social impact of the computer is not as an office automation tool, but as a communication tool, as a community-building tool." Sabath, a founder of Sojourners and now director of web and digital technology, wrote that the web "could become a useful tool for helping us find each other and the resources we need to do the work we feel called to do."

This was a prescient view on a technology that was only at its early stages. Of course, no one could predict exactly how monumentally transformative that technology would be. Sabath wrote during "Web 1.0," also known as the "read-only" era. Web 1.0 essentially provided digital brochures (or, for churches, bulletins); it gave users a way to access and read information but minimal opportunities for interaction.

Web 2.0, or the "read-and-write" era, gave people a way to interact with others and generate their own content. Myspace, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter all represent read-and-write usages, but do so with online forums and web applications. It's the type of internet most people are familiar with, even if not by name.

The currently developing era of the internet is known as Web 3.0. While definitions vary, decentralization is often a key component of technologies that fall under Web 3.0. Blockchains are one of those technologies, and they enable cryptocurrencies (such as Bitcoin and Ether) and nonfungible tokens (NFTs)—the digital art that exploded in popularity over the last year.

Blockchain is essentially a technology that allows for secure, digital transactions of data that are verified on a public, decentralized ledger. Blocks are verified by "mining"—a process of complicated computations that take time and computer energy to complete—"miners" are rewarded with

a small piece of the transaction. After the first block is mined, each block that is verified on the chain refers to the previously verified block, making longer blockchains more secure and harder to falsify.

If all that is confusing, that's okay. The terminology and function of blockchains—like many new technologies—can take time and study to understand. Understanding the purpose of blockchains is easier: transparency, verification, and security. Christians, however, will have to consider how adopting the technology could affect their communities and vulnerable people in and out of the church. How might a more-decentralized digital world impact faith communities built on incarnation? Does deregulation open the door to an increase in the misuse of funds? Can the technology be co-opted by powerful institutions rather than used to further equality?

One result of decentralized networks is to disincentivize hacking, since data is spread across networks rather than one set of servers. Cryptocurrencies are verified by the code of the blockchain; no central authority controls a blockchain, so no server crash could take down a blockchain and no single authority could impede a verified transaction. Sending cryptocurrencies is faster than traditional methods that rely on banks or third parties such as PayPal, and it offers security that doesn't rely on the power or faithfulness of single entities.

Cryptocurrencies aren't the only thing that can be sent through a transaction. NFTs are sent through transactions, and their popularity is due to the verifiability of the art's ownership. Sure, anyone can download the JPG or a GIF of a piece of art, but blockchain can verify the ownership of the original, much like the difference between owning an original painting and owning a print.

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS CARE?

It's reasonable to ask why Christians ought to care about a technology in its beginning stages of implementation. The lessons from the adoption of Web 2.0, however, offer valuable retrospection. What would a church have done if it had anticipated the ways that community can be nurtured through Facebook? What if the weight and power of livestreaming services through YouTube had been considered in the '90s and early 2000s? The trend of blockchain suggests it may eventually be a part of the general fabric of life: Even choosing

to *disengage* with blockchain technology could require intentionality.

Brantly Millegan, director of operations for Ethereum Name Service, a company that allows people to register domains on the Ethereum blockchain, first became interested in the technology in 2013, through Bitcoin. His interest grew exponentially, and by 2015 blockchain became his "full-time focus." Millegan, who also holds degrees in philosophy and Christian theology, told *Sojourners* that blockchain "has the potential to really transform our world in radical ways."

For advocates of economic justice, this will mean the ability to circumvent banks and corporations in the pursuit of wealth redistribution. And if it seems unlikely that a technology as new as blockchain would be available to the economically oppressed sooner than banking, Millegan pointed out that many poor communities jumped straight to cellular phones—never having owned a landline. "Blockchain technology puts the whole world in one financial system ... and the barriers to entry are very low. You have some sort of computing device, like a



smartphone or a laptop or something, and you have to have access to the internet,” Millegan says. “Although there are still barriers, it’s a much smaller barrier than [whether] a huge corporation decided to set up shop in your town. That is a huge expense and barrier to entry—and it’s something you don’t even control.”

Rev. Zach Courter, a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America who currently serves a church in Hungary, cites the benefits of speed and verifiability in transaction as a way cryptocurrencies can help the church in its work. “[Cryptocurrencies] can be distributed quite quickly and quite precisely,” Courter says. “If you want to give to a charity in XYZ country, if that organization has a connection with the church and they create their own Bitcoin wallet, that money can be transferred, and you can be assured that it’s there in about 30 minutes ... or even faster if it’s a smaller quantity.” Courter has friends doing disaster-relief work in Latin America, and notes that “some folks are already using cryptocurrency. Instead of having someone buy all the supplies and then [distributing

to people in need], they were collecting people’s online wallets and then they’d send them 50 bucks to say, ‘You get whatever you need now.’ And they could do that in minutes, instead of days or weeks.” Platforms such as Stellar have used blockchain to make it easier for immigrants to send remittances back home.

Cryptocurrencies aren’t the only potential area that blockchains might be utilized for a church. Through blockchains, people could hold all their assets digitally and not have to rely on a third party for verification. While NFTs are currently used for digital art, the only thing standing in the way of NFTs being used for verifying ownership of property—even as big as homes—is social convention, Millegan says.

HOW MIGHT THE CHURCH USE IT?

David Phelps, a writer who focuses on Web 3.0 technologies and their social impact, thinks the church could begin utilizing blockchain for better managing its own governance, finances, and more.

Smart contracts, a technology that operates on a blockchain, could help church budgeting. Essentially, smart contracts are programs that run on the blockchain and self-execute. Once the code of a smart contract is written and implemented, it doesn’t need oversight or management. Churches could utilize smart contracts to divide tithes among staff salaries, building maintenance, and other areas of concern. Then, again using smart contracts, funds could automatically distribute to those in the church community who need or utilize them.

Of course, there are dangers with self-executing contracts. They don’t allow

for human discretion, meaning they need to be carefully considered before being implemented. In the broader crypto-community, there have been fiascos, followed by debates, when someone takes advantage of a programming loophole—is it theft, or is it within the parameters set out by the contract? But smart contracts on the blockchain have their advantages. A church’s finances could be public, and their usage wouldn’t have to be mediated in the day to day by individuals. If a church community votes to allocate budgets to certain percentages, smart contracts can ensure that happens. “[We’ve] seen churches do this traditionally, right? When a member of the church is in need, others step in and support,” he says. “Smart contracts are laws. They are the laws of the internet, and [they are] decentralized laws because they are laws that enact themselves. Once you’ve created the smart contract, everything is going to operate that way.”

In more mundane uses, churches could mint their own cryptocurrencies to be used as a voting mechanism—each member could be given a “token” that gave them voting power, and members could then vote with the speed, verifiability, and simplicity of cryptocurrency transactions.

While blockchain technologies may not be at the forefront of ecclesiological concerns today, neither were social media and the World Wide Web in 1995. At some point, it’s likely Christians will have to consider what and how they want to influence the use of blockchains as it relates to property.

In response to *Sojourners*’ request for comment on blockchains and cryptocurrencies, The Episcopal Church, The United Churches of Christ, and The United Methodist Church all said they do not monitor, use, or accept cryptocurrencies at this time (representatives of each denomination said they were unable to speak for individual congregations).

**"TECHNOLOGY CANNOT BECOME
AN IDOL. WE CANNOT THINK
IT CAN DO FOR US WHAT ONLY GOD
CAN DO FOR US."**



"I can't just open up the catechism and find the paragraph on cryptocurrency or blockchain technology," Millegan says. But he does believe Christians can have a role in helping form the way blockchain is implemented in local and global communities. "There's this idea of taking the good of this world and baptizing it... I would encourage all Christians to get involved," Millegan says. "We are building a new world with blockchain technology right now. We are setting precedents, we are setting values, and the more Christians we have, the more Christian influence there can be in that process."

Courter is currently working to get his denomination to embrace Bitcoin. Courter wrote an eight-page position paper outlining how the technology could be used to further the denomination's interests. Courter argues that cryptocurrencies, with their low barrier to entry, are "far more anti-racist, feminist, queer-affirming, and open to people of differing physical abilities than the existing financial system." He says the church should be studying and educating congregants on blockchain technologies now because the time for discernment is *before* the technology is widely applied. He says it will take years for churches to figure out how, and if, they should utilize blockchains and cryptocurrencies, so getting out ahead of the technology's widespread application would have its benefits.

L.M. Sacasas, a tech ethicist and writer, points to a principle used by some Amish communities as an example of how groups can fully consider new technologies. He says the first step is to simply be aware that technology can "alter the fabric of our community."

"If we think about technology from an exclusively individual frame of reference, that's already going to hamstring our ability to navigate the kinds of challenges that new technologies may present," Sacasas says. "The principle we can draw from [the Amish approach] is that they don't 'adopt first, ask questions later.' ... They have something they value—their community, the way of life their community incarnates—and they will privilege that over the adoption of new technology and whatever benefit that technology may ostensibly give them."

This ethic applies for more than just complicated technologies such as blockchain, Sacasas says. People should consider the way even minor technologies such as clocks and dinner tables alter our sense of self and community. As it relates to digital

technology, Sacasas says the Christian emphasis on embodiment speaks strongly to "the goodness of the body and its limits."

"Technology cannot become an idol," Sacasas says. "We cannot think that it can do for us what, from a confessional standpoint, only God can do for us."

WHAT ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?

The energy consumption required to "mine" and verify new blocks is significant. For many, headlines about how "Bitcoin consumes 'more electricity than Argentina'" (from the BBC) and "Bitcoin Uses More Electricity Than Many Countries" (*The New York Times*) are convincing arguments against the technology amid the environmental crisis.

The energy consumption of a specific blockchain—such as Bitcoin—is possible to estimate because the mining and transacting, which consume identifiable amounts of energy, happen on a public ledger. But those estimates can't say how that energy is produced. Some blockchain mining is produced using renewable energy, and while estimates vary between 30 to 73 percent, even the low end of the range would be more than the total U.S. energy that comes from renewable resources (which was 20 percent in the year 2020, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration).

The high level of energy consumption comes from the primary method blockchain uses for verification, known as proof-of-work. "In practice, [proof-of-work] has worked extremely well, but it has this problem of spending huge amounts of electricity," says Millegan.

There are two primary arguments in favor of embracing blockchain, despite the energy consumption. First, proof-of-work is not the only method that could be used for verification. So-called proof-of-stake, which uses negligible amounts of electricity, requires one to take a stake in the native cryptocurrency. Cheating the system would only cheat oneself, and it would require a tremendous effort to make that cheating worth it.

Second, while it's fair to be concerned about the current energy these cryptocurrencies consume, advocates might ask: How much electricity does our current financial system use? "If you took every single person [involved in finance], all their buildings, all the infrastructure, and added it together, who knows how much electricity that is,"

Millegan says. "But we don't even think of it in those terms. Our current financial system is wasting a lot of electricity."

Sacasas, who says that he is still working to understand and evaluate blockchain himself, agrees that "if the criticism [of blockchain] is about the carbon footprint, then certainly it would be perfectly legitimate to inquire about the carbon footprint of the existing financial system, etc., [and] how you ultimately measure and compare those things."

BLOCKCHAIN AND NEIGHBORS

The decentralized structure of blockchain technology impacts the community that forms around it too. Unlike the Web 2.0 tech boom that was centralized in Silicon Valley, it's common for Web 3.0 companies and teams to be fully remote. For instance, Millegan's team at Ethereum Name Services has members in Taiwan, New Zealand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

This decentralization can provide opportunities for fairness and opportunity, say many of those working in blockchain. New insights often bring ways of forming community and new ways of imagining the world. When the geocentric model was disproved, Christians learned that they were literally not the center of the universe. Phelps says blockchain might offer new ways to think about ourselves—or even God—and adds that "what I find exciting in blockchain technology" is "the idea that what's really special in humans is the connections between them."

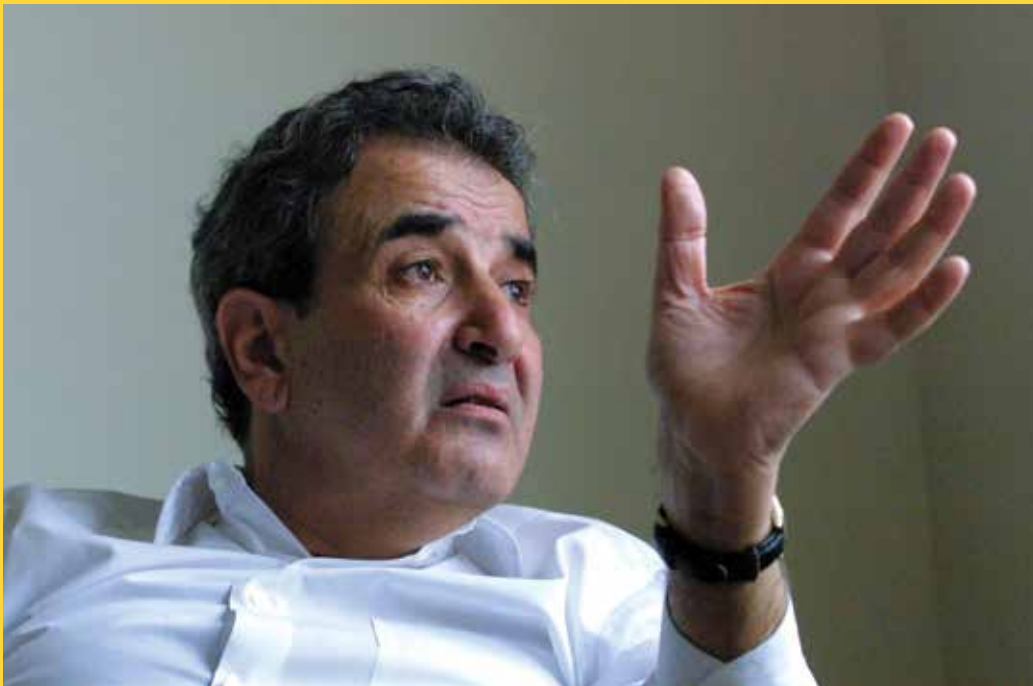
Sacasas also wants Christians to consider the way technologies may impact the connection between neighbors. Security doorbells with cameras are often embraced as an enhancement of safety, but their partnership with police departments and the historic use of surveillance to oppress minorities should cause Christians to consider whether they want to aid and abet police in such a way.

"There are certainly many opportunities for Christians to draw on the theological tradition, the moral tradition, and to apply it, reflectively and carefully, to technology," Sacasas says. "But the first step is just to recognize that technology has this kind of moral valence—which we often don't immediately recognize." ♦

Mitchell Atencio is assistant news editor, sojo.net.

“I AM A POET OF HISTORY,” SAYS LAWRENCE JOSEPH.

By Robert Hirschfield



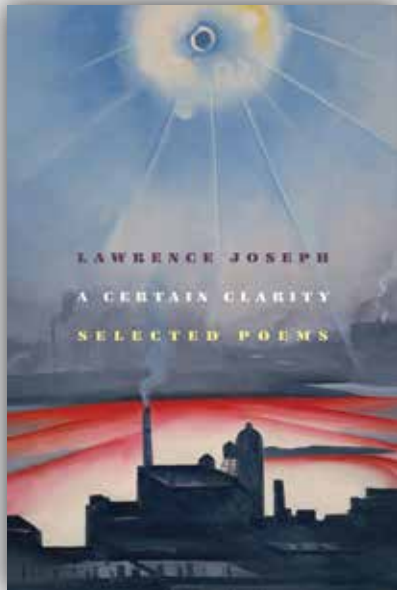
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History has paid personal attention to Lawrence Joseph, a Maronite Catholic from Detroit. In 1967, when Joseph was 19 and just finished with his freshman year at the University of Michigan, his father's grocery-liquor store was looted and burned

Poetry

during the Detroit Rebellion. The five-day uprising of Black people reacting in part to police abuse and brutality and its fierce suppression by law enforcement and the National Guard made him “acutely conscious of America’s deeply systemic violence.”

Joseph, a poet who was also a lawyer who taught at St. John’s University in Queens, N.Y., and at Princeton, was living a block from the World Trade Center in 2001 when the two planes attacked. He and his wife had to evacuate their apartment. It was weeks before they could return. In the title poem of his 2017 volume *So Where Are We?*, Joseph writes:



*flailing bodies in midair—
the neighborhood under thick gray powder—
on every screen. I don't know
where you are, I don't know what
I'm going to do, I heard a man say;
the man who had spoken was myself.*

The unspecified “you” almost certainly refers to his wife, from whom he was separated during the attack. Readers familiar with his work, but not with his life, could be forgiven for having surmised another “you,” one we find in the poem’s closing stanzas: “Ten blocks away the Church of the Transfiguration, / in the back a Byzantine Madonna— / there is a God, a God who fits the drama / in a very particular sense.”

“In each book,” Joseph said, “I develop and repeat certain general themes: time, place, memory, God, history, class, race, beauty, love, poetry, identity.”

An Arab-American of Syrian and Lebanese descent, Joseph, author of seven books of poetry, most recently *A Certain Clarity: Selected Poems* (2020), writes of his childhood, “Before the altar of God / I spent hours on my knees.” Among most contemporary readers of poetry, Joseph says, God would not rank high thematically. “A reader will pick up a book, see the word God, and not want to read it,” he laughs, unperturbed.

The 73-year-old, plain-spoken and scruffy-bearded (unlike his dignified book jacket photos), fits the image of a poet of the prophetic left, albeit with less ecclesiastical baggage than his predecessors, Thomas Merton and Dan Berrigan. He admires a wide range of poets: Peruvian César Vallejo, for reasons moral and political, Wallace Stevens for his aesthetics, Adrienne Rich on every level, and also Robert Hayden and Gertrude Stein.

During his fellowship at Cambridge, he became obsessed with Albert Camus. “Camus was not a pacifist, but he was non-violent.” He saw in Camus another branch on the tree of nonviolent Catholicism, possessing the crucial element of “moral conscience,” a phrase he first came across in the introduction to a volume by Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert (another poet he admires). “There it is!” Joseph thought: a confirmation of the direction in which he’d been heading.

“Vietnam was occurring during Vatican II,” he emphasizes. Racial violence as well. “This was all part of the same thing.” The *thing* is the “American imperium.” Those words, unarguably heavy, roll easily off Joseph’s tongue. They kick up a lot of dust in his poetry. But the human dimension is not overlooked. His poem “In the Age of Postcapitalism” begins:

*The disabled garment worker
who explains to his daughter
he’s God the Holy Spirit
and lonely and doesn’t care
if he lives or dies.*

Much gets written in our post-9/11 world about the physical and psychological violence endured by Arab Americans. It is therefore eye-opening to read Joseph’s accounts of growing up in the late ’50s and ’60s when the United States was preoccupied with its Asian wars. People of Arab descent may not have made headlines at that time, but making themselves disappear into the diverse American landscape was not easy. Raised in a home that was a transplanted Lebanese room redolent of olives, onions, lamb, and *kousa*, Joseph says that out in the street he was sometimes called “sand n—.” In a poem of that name he notes: “Outside the house my practice / is not to respond to remarks / about my nose or the color of my skin.”

Joseph’s poetry also addresses themes related to the violent lands his grandparents left, and the violent country they became part of. *So Where Are We?* could easily serve as the title for every one of his volumes. In light of decades of U.S. obsession with reshaping Middle East politics, his poetry could be classified as essential reading.

cont’d on page 41

**JOSEPH BRINGS
A REFRESHINGLY
JAUNDICED EYE
TO HIS ROLE AS
WITNESS TO A
GENERATION OF
VIOLENCE.**



On Screen

New & Noteworthy

TV EPISODES AS SHORT STORIES

By Da'Shawn Mosley

S

Some TV shows are as great as our greatest literature. Programs such as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Mad Men*, and *Breaking Bad* are Dickensian in their sprawl and Shakespearean in their tragic characters' deceptions. But one show in this current Golden Age of tele-

vision is the most oft-overlooked of its peers, one whose greater feat—or unfairness to screenwriters—is that it's not scripted. I'm talking about A&E's reality show *Hoarders*.

I'm not kidding. What often draws people to watch those suffering from hoarding disorder and the psychologists, professional organizers, and loved ones trying to help them overcome mental illness is the typical reality TV magnet: Seeing the life of someone worse off than you. But there's more to *Hoarders* than that. A good episode is nothing less than a short story similar to those by Alice Munro, vivid in its deep analysis of real life, family dynamics, and psyches in danger and repair. Almost every night for the past month, watching has been like studying fiction writing in some of the best (and cheapest) creative writing courses I've ever taken.

"Televised evil," wrote literary critic Adam Kirsch about TV's failure to fully match the quality of great literature, "... almost always takes melodramatic form: Our anti-heroes are mobsters, meth dealers or terrorists. But this has nothing to do with the way we encounter evil in real life, which is why a character like Gilbert Osmond, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, is more chilling in his bullying egotism than Tony Soprano with all his stranglings and shootings."

The real people in *Hoarders* underscore this. I've been more unsettled by some participants than by Heath Ledger's psychopathic Joker in *The Dark Knight*. I've also been moved to tears and reminded that sorting people is never as easy as "good" and "bad."

In this show I've seen a Christian hoard so many canned goods (which he had intended to give to the needy) that they nearly physically and emotionally swallowed his wife's presence in the house and any hopes of saving their marriage. I've seen a young man hoard toys and items affiliated with adolescence because he was stunted by the faith of his Christian father, who loves his son so much he weeps, but to whom homosexuality is a sin.

Hoarding affects ordinary people. This show largely explores rural life, examining families across ethnicities and identities and revealing the commonalities in our traumas and our recoveries. It's what the best literature is all about. ♦

Da'Shawn Mosley

(dashawn-mosley.com), a former *Sojourners* associate editor, lives near Washington, D.C.

REDISCOVERING GOD

Katie Pruitt's debut album, *Expectations*, explored growing up gay and Catholic in the American South. On her new podcast series, *The Recovering Catholic*, she speaks with comedians, religious leaders, and other artists about how they see God and what spirituality means today.

Osiris Media



Living with Dignity

Travis Lupick's *Light Up the Night: America's Overdose Crisis and the Drug Users Fighting for Survival* centers activists organizing to decrease overdose deaths through harm reduction strategies. As users, they understand that to improve health outcomes, they must challenge policies that criminalize them.

The New Press



Resisting Inheritance

In *Undoing the Knots: Five Generations of American Catholic Anti-Blackness*, Maureen O'Connell uses her family history to illuminate how American Irish Catholics and others chose whiteness over racial justice. She looks at how to dismantle white Catholic identity and the social structures it created.

Beacon Press

There's a moment in the Hulu miniseries *Dopesick* in which a Drug Enforcement Administration officer walks into her supervisor's office to talk about the wave of opioid addiction that was, in the early 2000s, already rampant in

Over the past few years, documents uncovered in various lawsuits have made it clear that Purdue Pharma, privately owned by members of the Sackler family, was “the cartel” behind a plague of addiction and overdose that has so far killed more than a half-million Americans. And the kingpin of this cartel was Purdue’s Richard Sackler, former company president and co-chair of the board of directors.

In 2007, Purdue Pharma and a couple of its executives pleaded guilty to lying about OxyContin's addictiveness and abuse potential, then got a slap on the wrist. That 2007

SACKLER HIRED AN ARMY
OF ATTRACTIVE YOUNG SALES
REPS AND AIMED THEM AT
SMALL-TOWN DOCTORS.

There we see family doctor Samuel Finnix (played by Michael Keaton), who's spent 40 years trying to ease his patients' hurts. He's low-hanging fruit for a Purdue Pharma salesman who promises that less than one percent of OxyContin users become addicted. We see Finnix slowly but surely surrender to OxyContin's false promises and become complicit in the devastation of the community he loves.

In 2010, Purdue Pharma released a new version of OxyContin that could not be crushed for easy snorting or injection. But by then there were hundreds of thousands of dopesick Americans facing agonizing opioid withdrawal symptoms. And Mexican drug cartels were there to take up the slack with cheap and abundant heroin. That part of the story is far from finished. 2020 was the worst year yet for drug overdose deaths (more than 93,000, most from opioids).

Recently, Purdue Pharma reached a financial settlement of the OxyContin claims against it, which requires the company, and members of the Sackler family, to lay out billions of dollars to begin repairing the damage of the past 25 years. However, the settlement allows the company to continue to operate. It also lets the Sacklers keep much of their ill-gotten gains and immunizes them from future lawsuits.

Today Richard Sackler lives, with his money and his immunity, in a hilltop mansion outside Austin, Texas. Meanwhile, one of his professional peers, Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, kingpin of the Sinaloa drug cartel, is doing “life plus 30 years” in a U.S. maximum security prison. ❖

January 2022



**"WAS FREEDOM WORTH IT
IF YOU STILL ACHED LIKE THAT?"**

her mother. When white patients recoil from Libertie's touch—and her mother does not defend or shield her—Libertie begins to lose faith in her mother's version of freedom.

Before this, the first seed of doubt arrived in the form of that "resurrected" escaped slave, Mr. Ben, who pined for a lost love and sank into alcoholism. Libertie's mother revived his body but could not cure his broken spirit. Eventually, the man threw himself into the river. "Was freedom worth it if you still ached like that? If you were still bound to this Earth by desire?" Libertie asks after his death. It's a "blasphemous" question she cannot utter to her mother or anyone she knows. Because where her mother deals in measurable facts and goals, Libertie lives in poetry, songs, stories.

In time, Libertie leaves home, aching for a balm to her loneliness. She fails the college courses her mother approved, instead chasing a passion for music. Still searching for freedom beyond her mother, Libertie marries Emmanuel, a doctor from Haiti, who takes her there. Despite Emmanuel's love and promises, Libertie finds new fetters in Haiti. The consequences of coloniza-

tion and patriarchy persist. Colorism permeates daily life; no one knows what to do with the dark-skinned Black girl who Emmanuel brought home.

Throughout Greenidge's novel, the definition of freedom morphs and deepens like a song that reveals new truths each time we experience it. As Libertie struggles in each of her homes, Greenidge challenges us to interrogate how we perceive and examine freedom in our daily lives. Libertie's loved ones tell her to accept that reality is a world where her skin color determines her value, men in power abuse girls and no one says a word, and falsehoods become a person's truth. But despite the toll it takes, she refuses to accept the status quo. "I may not know myself," she writes to her mother, "but I know the loneliness of love." In this loneliness, Libertie forges forward. As she continues to grow, she carves her own way. ✨

Elinam Agbo earned an M.F.A. from the University of Michigan Helen Zell Writers' Program. Born in Ghana, she grew up in the U.S. Midwest.

THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

Libertie,
by Kaitlyn Greenidge
Algonquin Books

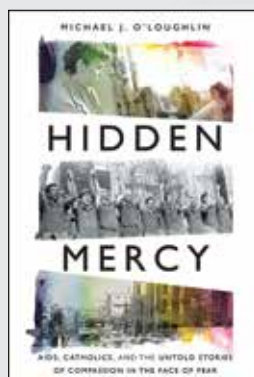
What is freedom, really? When we first meet the titular narrator of Kaitlyn Greenidge's novel *Libertie*, the year is 1860 and Libertie Sampson is a child in Kings County, New York, witnessing a miracle: Her mother, Dr. Sampson, raises a man escaping slavery "from the dead." Her father, a former slave who died before her birth, named Libertie after his "longing" for "the bright, shining future he was sure was coming." Libertie grows up watching her mother work, learning about the body's ailments alongside the plants and remedies that can allay suffering. Perhaps this—the ability to heal, to gain access to a position other Black women could not, to guide others to life outside slavery—is the freedom Dr. Sampson envisions for her daughter, who is raised to follow in her mother's footsteps.

But Libertie soon learns that she and her mother do not have the same privileges: Where her mother's light skin allowed her access to medical school, Libertie's dark skin means she cannot enter the same rooms as

CHOOSING COMPASSION

Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and
the Untold Stories of Compassion in
the Face of Fear,
by Michael J. O'Loughlin

Broadleaf Books



A

After two years of COVID-19, the world yearns to move forward. Meanwhile, we commemorate 40 long years of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the U.S. The first years were characterized by silence, as government, churches, and other institutions generally ignored people living with HIV and dying from AIDS. However, compassionate individuals broke the silence and offered care and advocacy. In *Hidden Mercy: AIDS, Catholics, and the Untold Stories of Compassion in the Face of Fear*, Michael J. O'Loughlin gives voice to Catholics who followed the gospel call to serve these marginalized in the U.S. in the 1980s and '90s.

Hidden Mercy, based on the podcast series *Plague: Untold Stories of AIDS and the Catholic Church*, focuses on the experiences of a few individuals—including a nun in the Midwest, a gay artist priest, and a lay Catholic nurse. One championed the first public HIV/AIDS education program—notably held in a Catholic church. Others advocated for hospital beds for HIV patients, established hospice homes, or ministered to the homeless and persons of color, who were—and still are—disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. They facilitated pharmaceutical clinical trials that included persons of color. Others led interfaith memorial services. These Catholics ministered to the sick while the institutional Catholic Church was first silent, later insensitive, and at times heartless in written and verbal statements targeting gay people with HIV/AIDS.

Hidden Mercy focuses on survivors, but the horrific experiences of people who lived and died with AIDS also need to be told. O'Loughlin references doctors and nursing home staff who refused to care for people with AIDS. Funeral homes turned away the deceased. Priests preached that AIDS was a punishment from God. Bishops used their influence to remove AIDS from death certificates, trying to erase the existence of gay priests. A mother told her 22-year-old gay son her biggest mistake was not having

aborted him. To preserve history and to honor the dead, these stories need to be told in more detail.

A strength of the book is how O'Loughlin, a gay Catholic journalist who has reported on the epidemics of bullying and suicide among LGBTQ youth and the firings of LGBTQ Catholic school teachers, acknowledges complexity rather than reducing history to simple binaries. He gives voice to tensions experienced by gay Catholics who were spurned by many in the church but craved healing through their faith and tradition—a tension O'Loughlin argues remains for LGBTQ Catholics. While some Catholics he profiles rejected church pronouncements on homosexuality, others could not do so outright at the time, but still “did the work because it needed to be done.” This work is not finished. Tens of thousands are diagnosed with HIV in the U.S. each year—mostly gay men of color—but there is no public outcry.

Through the models in *Hidden Mercy*, O'Loughlin challenges everyone—wherever they are on their journeys toward accepting and loving LGBTQ people—to fight injustice with compassion. In responding to this challenge, the millions of lives lost may be honored, not silenced. ♦

Arthur G. Fitzmaurice works in Kampala, Uganda, with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, improving health care for people living with HIV. His ministry includes serving homeless LGBTQ youth in a country where homosexuality is criminalized.



cont'd from page 36 He reads aloud his poem "The Game Changed" with a voice that disrupts the stillness of the day—that grabs you and doesn't let go.

*I hear the Maronite Patriarch
dares the Syrians to kill him, no word
from my grandfather's side of the family
in the Shouf. "There are circles here"—
to quote the professor of international
relations and anthropology—
"Vietnam, Lebanon,
and Iraq ... Hanoi, Beirut, and Baghdad."*

Joseph can at times bring a refreshingly jaundiced eye to his burdensome role of witness to a generation of military and economic violence that by now is so normalized that it generates a paralysis of indifference. In his poem "Some Sort of Chronicler I Am," he points to his churning of "emotional perceptions and digressions, / choler, melancholy," to which he adds the need at times "to see everything simultaneously." About the anger in his work, he concludes the poem "It's Not Me Shouting At No One" with an intriguing caveat: "It's not me shouting at no one / in Cadillac Square: it's God / roaring inside me, afraid / to be alone."

In a review in *Commonweal*, the late Michael True, a Catholic nonviolence scholar and activist, reflected on Joseph's poetry through these lines from Stanley Kunitz's *The Testing Tree*: "the heart breaks and breaks / and lives by breaking. / It is necessary to go / through the dark and deeper dark / and not to turn." ♦

Robert Hirschfield is a poet and journalist in New York City whose work has appeared in *National Catholic Reporter*, *Jewish Review of Books*, and other publications. His latest poetry collection is *The Road to Canaan* (Presa Press).

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QINAQIS READS ISAIAH

Isaiah 53:7-8; Acts 8:26-39

By Julie L. Moore

I am the angel who heard their euphony:
the Hebrew prophet's words turning to

lamb

topaz on Ethiopian tongue, their voices
wedded together, gleaming

knife

beneath the desert sun. Imagine it:
you are Qinaqis, born beside

ewe

the Gihon River that once flowed from
Eden, marked for exile

mute

from family, from choice,
from even the faith

sheared

you one day will embrace,
despite your pilgrimage through

torment

the wilderness. Stranger, slave.
Language works against you,

mockery

though its accents ring noble
& its rhythms are inescapable.

speak

You know God
is involved in what you read,

name

even as metaphor eludes you—
you need to know who was

living

cut off without complaint.
You want him to be real & can't help

count

seeing yourself in him, hoping
he understands you. So I sent Philip,

kin

who watered your seed like long-awaited
rain. And all afternoon it was dawn on

Earth.

Julie L. Moore, author of *Full Worm Moon*, directs the writing center at Taylor University in Indiana.



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GOD'S REVOLUTION OF VALUES

Scripture passages are from the Revised Common Lectionary, Cycle C

By T. Denise Anderson



Living the Word

I'm not sure where I thought we would be by now, but I didn't think we'd be here. A global pandemic has ravaged and killed

too many of our loved ones to name, though we could have contained it through collective measures. Climate change continues unabated despite decades of warning and appeal, and we may have missed our window to prevent its worst impacts. We're experiencing perils that are unnecessary and completely caused by our selective will.

Christmastide and the Epiphany season are opportunities for us to recall and perhaps draw hope from the story of God's inbreaking into a desperate human condition. But we must also remember that, despite God's extraordinary proximity to humanity in those days, trouble persisted. Jews were still under a repressive occupying power. They were worshipping in a temple built by a leader invested in his own oppression, put in power by their oppressor. Very little seemed to change. If anything, it appeared to get worse.

As with the people in those times, so it is with us today. We who read the text get a peek behind the veil of worldly power to see what God was doing in the shadows. We see what was obscured from those who cried to their Creator or who'd perhaps run out of tears to shed. We see what they could not see at the time. The preacher and teacher will need to pull back anew this curtain for the people—and for self.

T. Denise Anderson is acting director of Racial Equity and Women's Intercultural Ministries at the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and lives in Louisville, Ky.

OUR INDIVIDUAL LIGHTS SHINE FAR BRIGHTER IN TANDEM.

JANUARY 2

LIGHT SENSITIVITY

SIRACH 24:1-12; WISDOM OF SOLOMON 10:15-21; EPHESIANS 1:3-14; JOHN 1:1-18

"The light shines in the darkness," says the writer of John's gospel, "and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5). Light and darkness are morally neutral, and humans need both. Together, they regulate the rhythms of our sleep. We who are blind and can't discern between day and night may find staying awake during waking hours difficult. We who are sighted may find too much light interferes with our sleep. Overexposure to ultraviolet light can burn us, while too much darkness can trigger depression. Scripture's light/dark dichotomy isn't about the moral preference of one over the other; it's an acknowledgement that some things are imperceptible unless they are physically (or spiritually) illuminated.

Think of when you last went to a cinema to see a movie and the feeling of leaving the dark theater and walking into daylight. You recoiled because your eyes had adjusted to being in a dark space. John's gospel proclaims that Jesus came into a world that did not receive him (verse 11). Perhaps they were so accustomed to how they'd been that new illumination felt intrusive.

Whenever light seemed to break forth on our nation's racial iniquity—when Jim Crow ended, when the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed, when the first Black president was elected—we also saw severe resistance to that inbreaking. Wisdom springs from "the mouth of the Most High" (Sirach 24:3) calling every nation in every age to awake and get to work. Will we recoil or readjust?

JANUARY 9

NEW WORLD ORDER

ISAIAH 43:1-7; PSALM 29; ACTS 8:14-17; LUKE 3:15-17, 21-22

Epiphany and the baptism of Jesus signify the revelation of who Jesus is and what God has been up to among us. At his baptism, we are made aware that God is among us. But what does that really mean?

For a people who'd been battered by an imperial superpower and with no claim to their own land, the coming of the Messiah meant they'd be liberated from their oppressors. It meant that the prophet Isaiah's words would be realized, and God would "bring [their] offspring from the

east, and from the west” (Isaiah 43:5). Their hard-earned wages wouldn’t be stripped to line Caesar’s pockets, and the Lord would again give “nations in exchange for your life” (verse 4).

The military victory that was to have accompanied the Messiah’s arrival was nowhere to be seen, however. What came instead was a winnowing fork. John’s proclamation prepared the way for the Messiah with a call to repentance and right action because this reign would be different. It would reject pomp and circumstance, fancy vestments, and other markers of influence. It would challenge notions that strict adherence to the law necessarily marked one as wheat among chaff. Its seat would not be in a palace or complex, but in the hearts of every person through the Holy Spirit.

The reign of God brings with it a wholesale revolution of values reshaping the hearts and realities of oppressor and oppressed, and all will be called to bear fruit.

JANUARY 16

WALKING IN LIGHT

ISAIAH 62:1-5; PSALM 36:5-10;
1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-11; JOHN 2:1-11

In 1960, Selma, Ala., and the surrounding Dallas County had a voting-age population of nearly 30,000 people, and more than half of that population was Black. Due to violent voter suppression, however, only a few hundred Black people were registered. When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 still didn’t guarantee that Black people wouldn’t be impeded at the polls, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was invited into Selma to strengthen the voter registration movement. At the helm of the SCLC at the time was Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Initially, King didn’t envision becoming an activist. He wanted to be a professor, but in 1954 he began a pastorate at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. He would soon become the reluctant leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and later the face of a freedom movement.

The story of the wedding at Cana has Jesus somewhat humorously put on the spot by his own mother. Consider the juxtaposition of that story with the 1 Corinthians 12 discourse on spiritual gifts. What gifts lie beneath the surface of the community,

waiting to be exhumed? As it was with King and his parishioners, who can see the greatness in us before we can? The Isaiah text is post-exilic, but pre-second temple. It casts a vision of a glorious future in the face of loss and ruin and dares the hearer to take hold of that vision. Our texts shine light on a world that could be, if only we’d walk toward it.

JANUARY 23

SHINE ON US

NEHEMIAH 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; PSALM 19;
1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-31; LUKE 4:14-21

Cults of personality aren’t reserved for the entertainment industry; they exist in church and movement spaces as well. Sometimes we’re attracted to these spaces because of a leader’s celebrity. One danger of that is we may forget the role of each and every person in the work of liberation. I come from a tradition that acknowledges the ability—and responsibility—of the whole community to be ministers. We believe in a priesthood of all believers, but that doesn’t stop us from inadvertently creating formal and informal hierarchies. Our best attempts at parity still leave some out or imply that only the person in the pulpit is “special.” We similarly create idols of our rituals and writ.

Psalm 19 extols the beauty of the Lord’s ordinances, and the Nehemiah text describes the seriousness with which those who’d returned to Jerusalem after exile entered their new epoch. The priest Ezra—literally elevated above the people—reads the text as they all stand to their feet.

**WE CREATE SOCIAL CURRENCIES
TO DETERMINE WHO
COMMANDS RESPECT AND
WHO CAN BE COMMODIFIED.**

Something special is happening, and the Luke and First Corinthians texts show it happening in the body. Jesus reads (and sits) in the fulfillment of the law that is his corporeal self. Paul reminds the church at Corinth that they are, together, parts of a unit, none more important than the other.

Whatever the law and *logos* of God wish to show us cannot be fully understood outside of community and healthy interdependency. Our individual lights shine far brighter in tandem.

JANUARY 30

POWER STRUGGLE

JEREMIAH 1:4-10; PSALM 71:1-6;
1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13; LUKE 4:21-30

Constructs of power in our society are exclusive by design. The powerful are those with currency, whether monetary or social. We create social currencies like race and gender to determine who commands respect and who can be commodified. We are attracted to power and seek or create it for ourselves.

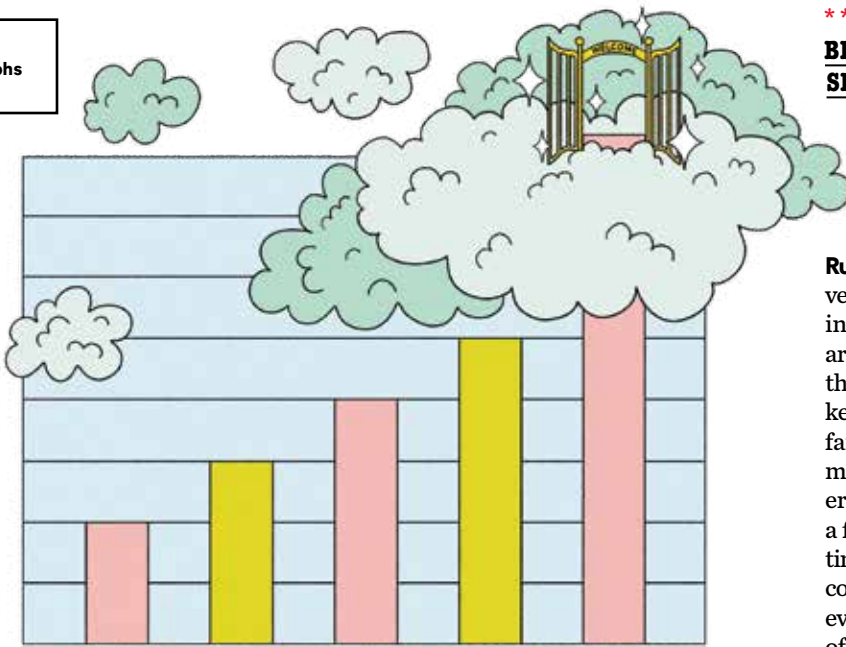
Our texts contain some power struggles worth examining. There’s Jeremiah’s struggle with his call and the struggle between Jesus and the people in the synagogue. Jesus’ hearers could not deny he was gifted, but they also couldn’t get past the fact that he was the son of a local carpenter. Human ideas of power deal in the superficial. We have preconceived ideas of what power is and who should have it, which does us a disservice. If we learn anything from the texts’ stories, it’s that God alone qualifies the called.

Jeremiah was just a boy. He was also appointed over nations and kingdoms. Jesus was just the son of a local carpenter. He was also the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of restoration for Israel.

It is ultimately God who empowers us. Yet, as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13, power is useless if it is devoid of love. Jesus healed and taught not out of ability, but love. The psalmist trusts God’s power amid peril (Psalm 71:5) because of God’s abiding love. Power without love is tyranny. ❖

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners’ online resource for Bible study and sermon preparation, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

H'rumps



BIBL IS THE IBM OF SPIRITUAL COMMODITIES.

Rule Two: Individual spiritual stocks can be very volatile; it's better to put your money into balanced spirit funds. Spirit funds are a basket of spiritual goods that reflect the entirety of a particular spiritual market. Look for a spirit fund that invests in faith and justice. It would be wrong for me to suggest that you invest in Sojourners (SOJO on the ticker), since I receive a free copy of *Sojourners* magazine every time I write for them, and thus have a clear conflict of interest in the matter. Although every issue raises up the overlooked voices of schoolteachers moonlighting as humor columnists and other such, ahem, prophets, so you can't go wrong with that.

Rule Three: Buy as many shares of Bible (BIBL) as you can. Or find them for free in a hotel room drawer near you. This is the IBM of spiritual commodities—its IPO was more than 2,000 years ago, and while its popularity has ebbed and flowed over the years, you can pretty much be guaranteed of a good return on the investment.

If you're considering buying other individual spiritual stocks, look closely to see if the resource aligns with BIBL. For instance, Christian nationalism (WOLFIN-SHEEPCLOTH) has been a hot commodity of late, but it's only a matter of time before its price plummets and the fruits of the spirit (YOUWILLKNOWTHEM) take its place on the charts.

Bottom line, as you take stock (see what I did there?) of your spiritual investments—or your financial portfolio—make sure you count the cost. You'll need to be, to coin a phrase, shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves every step of the way. Because when it comes time for the final profit-and-loss statement, it will be a sorting of the sheep from the goats, not the bears from the bulls. ❖

Joey Chin, a former *Sojourners* fellow, is an elementary school teacher in Redmond, Wash.

COUNTING THE COST

By Joey Chin

As we approach the new year, the more fortunate among us will be taking time to organize their lives by rebalancing their financial portfolios and considering new investments. While taking care of your cash, it's important to remember that a wise teacher once said, "Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy." I still don't know what vermin is (it's probably bad because it's in the same sentence as moths), but I think the teacher might have been telling us that in addition to tending to our finances, we should also tend to our spiritual portfolios.

If you're wondering about how exactly to do this, here are three rules to spiritual wealth that I think will prove helpful.

Rule One: Diversify. As you consider which spiritual resources to invest in, it's important to engage with a wide variety of topics and issues. Sure, all those Enneagram (stock symbol: ENGRM) books might seem interesting and cool, but I guarantee you that if 99 percent of your portfolio is Enneagram-themed, your long-term growth possibilities are limited. (Note: My own Enneagram type is the one that's skeptical of things like the Enneagram.)

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WE WALK WITH THEM THROUGH RAGE, RESENTMENT, AND DESIRE FOR REVENGE.

I was just a 13-year-old girl when the so-called internal armed conflict began in Guatemala. I wondered why there was so much hatred and resentment, why there was such discrimination against indigenous populations. Later, as a young woman studying for a psychology degree, I experienced the disappearance and assassination of many professors and fellow students at the university.

From Despair to Hope

One day a brother in the faith invited me to attend SEMILLA Latin American Anabaptist Seminary. There I learned to make the Word of the Lord my own. I learned that the Lord is one, present in diverse cultures and the many ways of blessing. And I learned that our Christian commitment is to accompany the most deprived, marginalized, and despised.

Healing Through Action

I graduated with a degree in pastoral theology and became the director of Utz Kaslemal ("Good Life" in the Quiché language). In this work, I coordinated the psychosocial-spiritual support of survivors of the war.

We accompanied families in the exhumation and identification of their loved ones, buried clandestinely to hide their cruel massacre. We walked with them through overwhelming rage, resentment, and desire for revenge. At times it seemed that only the Spirit of God lived in this place of desolation.

Hope Beyond Borders

Without the international SEMILLA community, this work would not have been possible. I thank them as we continue to be transformed together, seeking to make the Kingdom of God present, especially in the places of greatest darkness, sharing the love and mercy we have so generously experienced.

An Invitation

SEMILLA invites you to learn more at SEMILLAGT.ORG, including information about the CASAS (Central American Study and Service) program, providing Spanish language study (online/in person), cultural immersion, and education from a peace church perspective, for North American university and seminary students. For more information on short and long-term educational opportunities, including learning tours and sabbaticals, contact us via email at DIRECCIONCASAS@SEMILLAGT.ORG. God's shalom to you.